



# NGO's in the Nineties



**Desmond A. D'Abreo**

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## **PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

During the 70s and 80s the NGO sector has grown considerably. Government has begun invoking the Voluntary Organisations in many areas of its programmes for the poor and the down-trodden. It has also designed various programmes under the Five Year Plan exclusively to be implemented by the NGOs.

NGOs themselves have taken up many issues of public interest relating to ecology & environment, safeguarding of the natural resources, protection of human rights, struggles against exploitation, oppression etc. Also collaborated with government programmes like, health education, literacy campaign and other such mass movements.

Yet, there is insufficient material concerning NGOs, its nature and functions, origin and growth etc. Desmond D'Abreo, a development consultant, has tried to fill in this gap, pooling together his own as well as of others' experiences from pre-independence struggle to the present day. He has tried to present the historic perspectives of NGOs.

Our hope is that this booklet will engage many to have some clarity of thought and also enlighten those who are involved in this sector to function in a more effective and meaningful way.

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MAHESH H LOBO  
COORDINATOR  
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## PREFACE

The nineties, which we have recently entered into, promise to be a very critical stage in the history of our country. The strong pressure towards globalisation of the market economy has resulted in an economic policy for our country which will take good care of the small percentage, the elite, on the top of the economic pyramid. But it has very little concern, except in words and on paper, for the majority of our people who are struggling in poverty, misery and exploitation.

We seem to be conditioned to a growth-centred vision of development and tend to equate human progress with an increase in economic output. Such a vision is based on a number of assumptions. First, it holds that poverty is the result of inadequate growth. This in turn is caused by inadequate investment or capital. Second, it believes that economic efficiency is enhanced by modernisation and its corollaries, specialisation, the free market and international trade. These latter must decide what we have to produce. What the majority

of our population needs is not matter for much consideration!

To add to this international economic pressure, there is the strong tidal wave of homogenisation of culture through the invasion of Star TV and other means of commercial communication. These are a new form of colonialisation far more subtle, dangerous and impregnable than the one we fought against till 1947. They forebode the death of any indigenous culture!

We cannot expect the Government machinery to fight effectively against these forces that are overrunning our country, for the people in power and the elite who bring them into power see these forces as beneficial to themselves. Hence, voluntary action is the only potential catalyst that will be able to motivate our people to contend against these strong currents and bring our nation back on an even keel of justice, humanity and our traditional culture.

Voluntary action has been achieved for the past four decades by the voluntary agencies, or NGOs. They have worked intensively, struggled, suffered and many of their members have even lost their lives for the cause of the poor and oppressed. But with the passing of time, there is a change taking place in the NGO culture which may not be desirable. We have to be aware of the factors causing this change and must act quickly and effectively to help the whole voluntary sector to renew its pristine spirit and creative dynamism.

This little book is offered to its readers in the hope that it will help them to reflect on the present condition of the voluntary sector and to catalyse a change so that the voluntary agencies and groups will once more become active agents who work selflessly and ceaselessly for the full development of our people and of a society in which accords to each and everyone freedom and the respect befitting her or his human dignity!

# **I THE NGO PERSPECTIVE**

## **I. The Indian Situation Today**

A. The trend of instability, unevenness and fragmentation of political development in India has shaped up with a vengeance at this point of time. A very conscious ideological and political strategy is at work, deliberately shut out from our people. We need a realistic understanding of what has gone wrong with our polity. There is a grim consensus that India is passing through a period of major crises: economic, political, social, cultural and religious. The system has become inequitable and incapable of serving the people of India. Millions are unemployed and unchecked population growth continues to increase the number of hungry, desperate Indians.

In the context of local problems a national problem which has an all-pervasive impact should not be overlooked. This is the present national economic crisis. When presenting his budget on the 24th July, 1991, the Finance Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh said "this is the deepest and most acute crisis that Indian economy has faced since independence". The crisis he was referring to was the revenue crisis.

Several aspects have led to this crisis : the lack of will and the inability of the Government to control non-plan expenditure, which has led to burgeoning revenue deficits, the inability to generate additional employment in the organised secondary sector, continuing reduction in the country's share of global exports; slowdown in investment in capital and intermediate goods, increased inflationary pressure (despite a better than expected agricultural performance over the last three years), are few other symptoms of the structural crisis. The "green revolution" techniques do not seem to be able to expand agricultural productivity anymore.

Since the time the Indian planning process was initiated, the major emphasis has been on maximising our economic growth. This has been the broad focus of all our planning exercises. A mere lip service has been provided to the issues of equity and social justice. We are simply following the trickle-down theory of development. Here, one assumes that the benefits of rapid economic growth will percolate down to those segments of the economy which are not directly involved

in such growth. Experiences of several countries have definitively proved that this trickle-down approach has never worked to bring about social reform and the uplift of the lower sections of society.

The new environment that these reforms seek is to create a more open economy, with more intense interlinkages with the world economy. It can also make the economy more susceptible to external shocks and pressures. We have not been exposed to these earlier to such an extent due to our insular policies. It would also perpetuate a greater divide between India and "Bharat", unless specific remedial measures are undertaken to rectify this dualism.

In order to avert this crisis, the Finance Minister came up with a measure of devaluation of the rupee. This was first done on July 1st, 1991, when the rupee was devalued by 10 per cent. In his first budget in that same month, he set out on a unconventional economic trend. This budget dispensed with licensing for most industries, gave greater incentives for export, opened the country in a greater degree to foreign investment, and launched out on a programme of privatisation in industry and services. The budget also called for the abolition of all Cash Compensatory Support and of Actual User imports of most items, and of many OGL imports.

All these measures were meant to get the IMF to allow a loan, first of \$2 billion and later \$5 to \$7 billion.

The budget of 1992 went still further to bring structural change in the economy. Its first main thrust was to continue the macro-economic stabilisation effort which is to bring down inflation and to bring the balance of payments deficit under control. It was oriented towards reducing the fiscal deficit by keeping the expenditure down.

The second major thrust is the structural reform effort which started in the middle of last year. This budget gives it a very strong and positive thrust not only in the tax proposals, the restriction of custom duties and direct tax saving, which will have some effect on savings, but also on some of the policy changes regarding, for example partial convertibility of the rupee and the trade policy changes.

A very important question to ask here is : Why are we bending to international pressure to radically alter our economic system with a suddenness and in a direction that may lead to large number of closures, increased unemployment and a greater neglect of the poor.

As a consequence of this economic policy, the poor are going to suffer very much more. It has been said that the rich are taxed and the poor spared. But in reality it is the other way around, for whatever the pressures on the rich, the burden will be passed by them on to the poor. Because of this policy, the competition generated by the open market economy will push our own producers far behind the foreign elements that are going to be allowed in our country. A higher capital intensive industrialisation will deprive millions of employment. All welfare programmes like health, education, housing, etc., will be given second place to other programmes, most of which will be oriented to satisfying the foreign markets. There is the danger that subjects like education and health will be privatised, which means that the poor, especially the rural poor, will have no chance of education or health care.

Unless we orient the Indian economy to the vast number of people in our country, we are not going to stem the onslaught of international Capitalism. This capitalism is today at its highest and therefore can exert tremendous pressure.

What is worse is that there is a surfacing of the identity crisis which was always anchored in the Indian psyche. An increasing number of our countrymen, in different parts of the country, are not too sure of what it means to be an Indian. Many are even asking whether it is desirable to be an Indian at all. We are not talking only of the Sikhs, Kashmiris or Assamese. This loss of identity seems to be expressed by nearly every ethnic, religious and social group. Many Bengalis would seem more close to their fellow East Bengalis in Bangla Desh than to the Indians West of Bengal. The citizens of the seven North East states are ashamed to link themselves with Indians of 'the mainland'. Many Tamilians would identify themselves with their brethren in Jaffna rather than with the Hindi speaking powers in New Delhi.

The Gujeratis are not concerned about what happens to millions of tribals as long as the Narmada project comes

through. In Bengal nobody could be bothered if the upstream Damodar Valley is denied water as long as the DVC continues to emit electricity into Bengal.

Similarly with social and religious groups. Upper caste Hindus continue as they have done for centuries utterly to disregard what happens to the country's backward castes. They are only determined that the Mandal report has to be wiped out. Suddenly millions of militant Hindus have awakened after centuries of slumberous co-existence, to the need of destroying a Muslim mosque in order to replace it with a new Ram temple at Ayodhya. What the Muslim may feel about this does not concern them in the least!

Communalism today is a very major threat to the nation. If communalism spreads as it is doing today it will overwhelm every aspect of society, and will infect even the NGOs. In fact, communal organisations are trying to set up their own NGOs, so that they can bring about a polarisation in the whole voluntary sector.

Communalism is used by the politicians to create vote banks. They use it as a tool for "dividing and ruling". It is an intrinsic part of party politics of the elite for fragmentation of society and alienation of the religious, ethnic and linguistic groups. Besides, it is used by them to divert attention away from vital national issues detrimental to the political existence of individuals.

Lastly, Communalism manifests itself in death and destruction, in the creation of barriers of hate and suspicion. By pitting the poor against the poor, it succeeds in keeping society segregated and confined to the dark chambers of submission and despair. What ultimately is communalism in today's India which has brought death and hatred, agony and suffering of unimaginable magnitude, violence and destruction, division, enmity and the alienation of millions of our countrywomen and countrymen?

Communalism is not just a religion-cultural phenomenon, or merely a political issue. Neither is it caused and determined only by economic factors. Communalism is a purely secular, that is, a socio-economic political phenomenon, but with a

strong religious perception. With the coming of the British there was a change in the economic and political structure, and communalism came on the scene. It was all a matter of how much of the share was to be given to the Hindus, to the Muslims, etc. In fact, even later on, a Muslim leader is reported to have said "India is not ready for democracy, since it has several religions."

## **Political Instability in India**

A major cause of these several crises is certainly the political instability of our country. We have had two changes in the Government in a brief space of two years. The political parties are the most ludicrous actors in the whole tragico-comic drama. Some of them speak for the Hindus, like the BJP; others are surfeited with Assamese chauvinism; still others are vitriolic in their support of Muslims. Politicians, generally, are not concerned about the poor, the neglected and marginalised. They only see them as vote-banks to be wooed at the time of elections. Their primary concern is their own self-aggrandisement and wealth accumulation. Both individual politicians, and each political party seem to be standing for themselves, and are not concerned about the millions who are struggling against the soul- wrenching and body- destroying problems that are prevalent all over the country.

## **2. The Root Cause of All Problems : Systemic Injustice**

In spite of all the promises that these political parties and their minions make to us, India is still a developing country. Most Indians lack the basic human necessities of food, clothing and shelter. Much less can they afford education or cultural leisure. The majority of India's people are poor, marginalised and oppressed. In fact, a predominant characteristic of the Indian situation is a total misery and poverty of the Indian masses. An unequal sharing of whatever gains there are in the economic field has frustrated the realisation of the objective of social justice and has deepened the disparity in income distribution. The demand and supply operation in today's economic system leaves very large pockets of poverty.

As a matter of fact, India is not just a developing country, but truly an underdeveloped country. Though it is a nation that has

good potential prospects for using more capital, labour and other available resources to support its present population at a high level of living, yet there exists in it an exploitation so oppressive that the vast majority of its people live at a sub-human level.

It is very clear that more than 40 per cent of Indians, numbering more than 340 million, are living below the poverty line. Many are tumbling every year below this line, mainly due to the fact that prices have risen in each year of the Seventh Plan. and everybody knows how they are still increasing unbelievably today! The majority of our people are living in the culture of poverty.

### **The main elements of this culture are :**

- a. a tendency for disintegration in the name of religion, caste, economic status and educational disparities.
- b. inability to forego immediate gratification in favour of a better future
- c. a sense of resignation and fatalism
- d. male superiority
- e. weak ego born out of a state of poverty and suffering
- f. sexual inhibitions and superstitions.

If we were to delineate in sharp terms the actual situation in our country today at the beginning of the decade, we could state that they are the following :

1. Widening gap between the rich and poor. Some of the poor are practically ignored in the process of development, like the tribals, while others are in very subtle ways kept on the lowest level of society, like the dalits.
2. Process of improvement is slow. It has adverse effect especially on the landless labourers and small farmers who are losing their land to the rich and MNCs and migrating to the slums.
3. Inability of the Government to implement judicial and practical consequences of principles of equity laid down in the constitution, or with new problems created by growing disparity and by poverty itself.

4. Low priority for women and children is reflected in the diminishing allocation to education, health and formation programmes in the national budget. They are the hardest hit victims.
5. The price of goods produced here is decided by the West.
6. Our forests are being despicably plundered by multinationals and the elite of our country.
7. The population explosion hampers speedy development. People's growth is not harnessed through education and employment facilities.
8. Corruption is a way of life in our country like in many developing countries, where it sometimes goes by euphemistic labels, e.g. "inorderly expenses" (Thailand); "wise action"(Indonesia)!
9. Most Indians have a white collar mentality, and are not ready to work at menial jobs or jobs unattached to an office stool!
10. The policies of the international financial systems like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, contribute greatly to widening the gap between the rich and poor within a country and between countries.

From this if we were to select the major national problems besetting the majority of our population they would be the following:

- a. poverty
- b. unemployment
- c. illiteracy
- d. social inequality - gender, tribal and caste discrimination
- e. corruption
- f. religious fundamentalism and communalism

Linked up with these problems are the real issues in the concrete present situation in India:

prices  
corruption  
communal division  
overpopulation

unjust economic growth,  
lack of quality education  
no responsive and accountable government

These are the issues on which the people have to assert themselves vigorously in every forum that is available to them. To help them do so is the *raison d'être* of every development voluntary agency.

However, given the dire straits in which our country is and the clear signs that it is plunging still deeper into the morass of chaos and inhuman inequity, is social change at all possible? Has it ever taken place in human history?

### **3. But we have a dream :**

- A dream in which children will no longer be put to inhuman work in the match factories and carpet industries, in the homes of the rich as domestic workers, in restaurants and hotels to do the most menial and degrading jobs, but will be able to go to school, and develop with the full potential and human dignity that every person has a right to.
- A dream in which women are treated as equal to men with regard to respect, ownership and companionship, and are not in any danger of being burnt as brides, or sold for dowry, or malnourished and ill-treated from the very moment of their birth - if they are allowed to be born at all!
- A dream in which there will not be a segregation of Dalits in remote, unhygienic, filthy and sordid cheris or hamlets, but can live with their other fellowmen in dignity; can work side by side with people of all castes, and can take their rightful place in society as Indian citizens.
- A dream in which tribals will not be evicted from their natural habitats which are the forests and scattered among the people of the plains. A dream of the tribals preserving their genuine and uniquely human culture and value system and sharing them with the other cultures that need humanising. A dream in which they are not made victims economically, socially, psychologically and spiritually of the swindlers and bandits who wait in the cities and plains for them as easy prey.

- A dream of fulfilling people's democratic aspirations which are the fulfillment of minimum provisions and facilities for all, in food, in access to drinking water, in health and nutrition through paramedical and ancillary services; through education that focuses on literacy and elementary and vocational education for all; through transport and roads and area planning that is built through intermediate and relevant technologies; through a system of welfare that caters to basic minimum needs of the poor and rural people; through a structure of administration that deals with these minimum demands instead of some more sophisticated and computerised model of governance; through judicial institutions that attend to people's pressing problems and conflicts.

But, today, at the turn of the decade, we have to take stock and seriously consider whether the voluntary agencies have been effectively working to make this dream come true, whether they have been fulfilling the goal for which they came into existence. We have to determine carefully what approach and strategies they must adopt in order to realise this dream and be relevant and useful in the nineties to the millions who are hungering and thirsting after justice, peace and human dignity.

In order to understand the role and function of the NGOs in the present decade, it is important that we see the development of the voluntary development sector in the past four decades since it took shape in our country.

#### **4. Voluntary Groups in the Fifties**

The present development efforts in our country find their roots in the movement for Independence already in the early thirties. There were many groups of young people that banded together to work for independence. They took up various activities on their own or within the national movement for independence in order to disrupt the British rule, created law and order problems for the authorities and joined in protest marches, sathyagrahas, etc.

When independence was achieved, most of these groups were disbanded. But many of them, especially those in the rural areas and the ones from urban regions adjacent to rural areas, turned their attention to helping people in the villages to

improve their socio-economic situation. They initiated various programmes for literacy, health care, especially the building of latrines and other amenities, desilting of village tanks, and in general, doing anything that the villagers needed, or that they felt the villagers should have.

This activity was primarily rooted in a political vision of enabling the people of independent India to rule themselves. These young people adhered to several different ideologies. Many of them, especially those whose political affiliation was to the Congress, were Gandhians. There were also those who belonged to the Hindu revivalist associations, like the Ramakrishna mission. Many of the young people were Marxists or belonged to other leftist groups. Some of these groups were Christian, having been influenced or motivated by the AICUF (All India Catholic University Federation) and SCM (Students Christian Movement)

But these Christian groups were generally not politically oriented. Their primary inspiration to work for the poor and suffering came from their religious faith. At the time of Independence, the Christian Church had generally kept aloof from the political field, because it realised that the new rulers would not be as favorable to it as the British. This attitude of alienation from politics was handed down to the Christian communities and Christian individuals in general. Hence those Christian groups who worked for development after independence kept away from any political thinking or association.

There was a tremendous elan that was almost tangible in these young people working for their fellowmen. They worked together and also in collaboration with the villagers, irrespective of caste or religion. We remember occasions when we went to work during our holidays, in the villages not far from Bombay. Every day we would ask a village woman in turn to cook the evening meal for all of us. Everyone who had been working that day, even the local government official, would share in the meal, without any concern for the caste to which the one who prepared the meal belonged, and often, she was a Dalit woman!

Then came the Community Development Programme of the Government, initiated on the 2nd October, 1952. This

programme in practice aimed at 55 community projects, covering more or less 1300 sq.kms. in three development blocks, each with 300 villages and 2 lakh people. These subdivided into units of five villages having one multipurpose Village Level Worker. These were controlled by the Development Commissioner who worked in close collaboration with other technical departments. The actual execution of this Community Development Programme was the responsibility of the state Governments. At the district level, there was the Deputy Commissioner. The coordination of different departments was done by the Block Development Officer assisted by specialists in agriculture, animal husbandry, nutrition, education, etc.

But, this did not succeed mainly because of three reasons. First of all, the major benefits were monopolised by the land-owning castes and classes. This led to further increase in inequality. Then the issue of reducing inequalities was by-passed in favour of faster economic growth, e.g the Green Revolution. Finally, the fruits of the Community Development Programme were not evenly distributed.

The major causes of the failure of the Community development programme and of subsequent Government development programmes are that the planners and the Government personnel perceive the problem as one of policy and implementation. There is an absence of political commitment and strong leadership. They trace the problem to absence of structural changes in society. "It is not so much development which produces structural change, but societal structural transformation which permits effective development." (Gunnar Myrdal)

The whole concept of the Community Development Programme and of the subsequent development programmes as well as the National Education Scheme assume that the village community has many common interests and accepts implicitly the state as impartial, supra-class and a non-partisan body "No effort made to organise the masses or to impress upon their stake in agitating for a break-up of the country's rigid inegalitarian social and economic structure." (Gunnar Myrdal : Asian Drama p.1344.)

While it was intended to extend development activities and

benefits to all the poor in the country, especially in the rural areas, the attitudes the Community Development Programme generated were deleterious to the real development of people. People began to see development as a job. A bureaucratic spirit seeped into the whole process. The Government officials appointed for development work looked on the people as objects to be used to nurture their own careers.

In this atmosphere, salaries and jobs took precedence and motivation and commitment to the poor were given less importance and subsequently, eroded. Class distinction and caste discrimination were heightened. The villagers were not seen as people who could make any decisions on their own, but as "beneficiaries" who were to be helped, as the "target population" or statistics on whom jobs and tasks were to be effected.

The government officials selected for posts in the Community Development Programme were "qualified" in social work, having obtained university degrees in the subject. But the source material for their studies were drawn from sociologists and social workers in England, the United States, Germany and Israel. Influenced by these, they took on development methodologies and visions from the West, which had no relationship whatsoever with the situation in India. Basically, they worked on a Welfare state approach, doling out, creating assets for the poor, and concentrating on economic development. On the national level, this meant the building of huge dams, construction of hydro- electric projects, on the village level, the construction of schools and hospitals and in the agricultural sector, the introduction of fertilisers, pesticides, and the initiation of agro-based industries.

On the international level, with the foundation of the United Nations Organisation, many countries which until then had been colonies of western nations, were in this international body as autonomous representatives of newly independent countries. When these members of U.N.O. unfolded the situations prevalent in their countries, it came as a jolt to all present to realise that two-thirds of humanity were living in sub-human conditions. Everyone felt that something should be done about this.

Soon aid was pouring in from the developed countries into the

under-developed countries of the Third World. How to use this money did not seem to be a problem, because a tradition of help from abroad was already established especially by the Christian missionaries who came from the West to work with people in poorer countries. While the primary responsibility of these missionaries was seen by them to be the spreading of the Good News of Christianity, they did very much to help the people with whom they worked to live a more human life.

When the missionary movement started in India, the Church displayed a pioneering spirit. In the context of its evangelistic ministry, it made an analysis of the situation prevailing in the country and realised that it had to respond to the grave challenges of ignorance and disease. It therefore built up institutions to provide education and health services for the people, especially for the poorest who formed the majority of the rural population. Gradually, the worth of these institutions was universally recognised, and they were opened in the large cities and towns of India, where even till today, they have a wide influence and play an important role.

The Government and other organisations which were concerned about the uplift of the millions of poor people in our country emulated the pioneering efforts of the Christian missionaries with regard to health and education. They vied with them in the construction and running of schools and hospitals till it has become, to some measure, a competition between the Church and the Government as to running the better educational and health institutions.

## **5. Development Policies in the Sixties**

The Sixties were called the First Development Decade and they started with an overwhelming optimism and hope. It was generally felt that the transfer of capital and technical know-how which had revived Europe after the Second World War could now be extended to the Third World and it would bring about a similar economic growth to the developing countries. The development stress in our country was along these lines, and a heavy emphasis was placed on industrialisation and technological expertise. Development programmes were oriented to self-employment schemes and rural development through agriculture and agro-based industries.

Carried on by this wave of optimism, it was felt that development lay in the increase of educational and health institutions. Most social workers and the Government believed that these institutions were the best mode of serving the country. Western standards were taken as the norm for most urban schools, colleges and hospitals, and in the rural areas, it was hoped that with greater literacy and education and the improvement of health, there would follow the introduction of sophisticated technology, resulting in economic growth, greater employment and social change geared to an industrial revolution.

In the Sixties, there arose a certain amount of questioning and reflection among many people about the relevance of big institutions and of welfare-oriented activities to the real integrated development of people. But, on the whole, even while initiating economic programmes, many agencies, both religious and secular, who were running development projects, failed to break away from their charity and welfare-oriented mentality. As a matter of fact, in practically most organisations, development programmes became organised forms of doling out charity instead of becoming means of making the people self-sufficient. Some studies indicate that this has in fact continued the sense of dependence among the people who were "developed", and has even transferred it from the village headman, the money lender, the middle man and the landlord to the project holder.

Such dependence was caused not only by relief programmes. Even a well-organised project created or continued domination and dependence relationships, when the project holder acted as a middleman between the people and the foreign resource agency, and not as a catalytic agent to help the people develop themselves and bring about their own liberation from the many bondages that press down upon them.

## **6. Policies of the Seventies**

The various educational institutions in the country had produced a large number of educated people. Some of them had become aware of their role and responsibilities to their fellow citizens and they wanted to be involved in social work. From such people sprang up several groups, secular and religious, who initiated programmes for the community

development of the poor, either with foreign help or with indigenous resources.

The concept of transfer of capital and technical know-how to bring economic growth to the developing countries, so popular in the sixties, had not succeeded. In the seventies, a small number of groups in the country realised the dangers inherent to a purely technological, economic or paternalistic approach. This led to their re-thinking of their role in development. They believed that they had to pay greater attention to the human aspects of development and to the organisation of the people.

At that time, some foreign resource agencies began to insist on a viable organisation with people's participation to run the projects and give them continuity. Hence, many organisations turned to initiating development projects as registered cooperatives. The cooperatives, however, did not prove to be a success in giving the people a more equitable share in the benefits, for rather than being cooperation among equals, they turned out to be competition among unequals. The richer members derived far greater benefits than the poorer ones. This inequality was rooted in the very system.

However, the Emergency which was declared in India by Indira Gandhi on the 26th June 1975 sparked off a host of young people who realised that it was a dangerous move towards tyranny and dictatorship. Their vision of society was one in which every citizen would be able freely to make his or her own decision in the economic, social and political spheres. Hence, they felt the need of educating the grassroots people about the inherent dangers of the Emergency and about their own rights and responsibilities in society. These young activists asked themselves very fundamental questions about the development process. Triggered off by various youth movements, both Christian, like the AICUF and SCM, and Non-Christian, like the Gandhian, the sarvodaya groups and various leftist movements, these groups of young people reflected on the social work as it was being carried out and the impact which it had, or did not have, on the social structure.

As a result of their reflection, these groups realised that economic programmes were by themselves ineffective and that greater emphasis had to be given to the social and human

factors. They realised that in order to bring about a real change in the lives and situations of the millions who live below the poverty line in our country, a deep structural analysis of the socio-economic, political and cultural situation in our country is an essential foundation. They became convinced that in the Indian context, where the aim of development should be the enabling of the people to take their own decisions in every sphere of their human life, development necessarily becomes political action. They saw their own role as sharers in the act of liberation from unjust structures. Concentrating on human resources, they used non-formal education and awareness building leading to people's organisation as the only mode of action.

## **7. The Development Policies of the Eighties**

The eighties have brought a further evolution in the ideas and methods of some development groups. This evolution was caused by many factors, some of which were the changing situation in India, the interaction and dialogue that the groups have with one another working in the field of development and the insights they gain by sharing concepts, approaches and methodologies with visiting foreign experts and resource agency representatives.

The majority of organisations who are sincerely striving for development of the Indian people realise that a piecemeal approach is no longer valid. Most groups had until then tried to tackle isolated problems and issues, such as economic backwardness, lack of education, ill-health, women's issues, the ecological, caste, communal, political or other problems. A few groups now felt it necessary to take an integral approach and make education, that is, awareness building, and people's organisation the main tool for bringing about a just, participatory and sustainable society. The economic factor, they realised, cannot be overlooked, but it must be taken as an entry point or as the basis for education and awareness building of the people.

A further step taken by these groups is the building up of networks or federations of many action groups. However, these federations run the danger of becoming closed cliques, or "middlemen's clubs" in which representatives of action groups meet from time to time to discuss developmental

issues. They do not generally lead to the building up or strengthening of people's movements. Unfortunately, by and large, the Church organisations which constitute a large proportion of social work agencies and which have access to a very great share of foreign resources, are generally very closed in on themselves. Neither do they join with other Non-Christian Organisations, nor do they try to form any network or union of organisations. However, it is heartening to note that in the south, some Church groups are forming effective networks, and even working in collaboration with secular organisations for the building up of people's movements.

The latter part of the eighties has seen the rise of issue-based networks. Efforts are being made by groups to unite or collaborate on various specific issues. Groups that are working with fishermen are attempting to form networks, as are the groups working on women's issues, or on the ecological issue, on legal aid, human rights or on peace. It is hoped that the formation of such networks will consolidate the ideologies of the member groups and open up avenues for concerted actions and strategies, which will eventually give more effectiveness to the process and the struggle for the liberation of people.

## **II. The Present State of Development Voluntary Agencies**

There has been an evolution in the approach of the voluntary sector with regard to development. All the various approaches from the first primitive one of charity and welfare to the politically oriented action groups are co-existing at present in India.

### **1. Charity Approach, Relief, Welfare and Rehabilitation(re-establishing what was the situation of the people before).**

On the first level are programmes run on a charity-basis, where the relationship is purely that of giver and receiver. These programmes spring up where there is need of relief and welfare due to natural or humanly caused catastrophes. They originate from the feeling that people are in misery, must be helped immediately without asking if this help does help at all on the middle or long term perspective. Their motivation is compassion and love of the sufferer who very often is treated as the raw material for the salvation of the giver!

Normally, such programmes do not touch the root of the suffering of the people, but tend to become paternalistic, leading to dependency and passivity. However, in some cases, when their charity and welfare approach is linked up with awareness building and organisation, these programmes help to achieve liberation.

The voluntary agencies that take up such programmes are generally religious in nature and their concept of society is that it is essentially harmonious and that the system is good, and only individuals in it are weak or corrupt.

We still have plenty of such welfare projects where the immediate humanitarian sentiment prevails and there is no intention to effect permanent change. These fail to confront inherent social inequalities or to mobilise popular involvement, and their effects are usually milked away by exploitation or corruption by the power structure.

### **2. The Growth Approach**

The next generation of social action works along the growth

approach. This approach aims at the integration of India into the world economy on the basis of a liberal world trade order, a development through maximization of economic growth and the promotion of the industrial sector. The voluntary agencies that follow this approach work for all kinds of growth be it industrial growth, agricultural growth, or growth of the education system. India is a top example of this growth approach. Take for example the education sphere where the number of institutions is indeed very large, but still 68 % of the population remains illiterate!

The analysis made by these groups is deficient, for it sees backwardness as caused merely by climatic, geographic, socio- cultural, racial and caste, demographical or economic factors. Such an ideology believes in the trickle down theory and its development strategy is aimed at "catching up" with the developed country. It is oriented towards a sophistication and modernisation and growth thereby forgetting the majority who are marginalised.

The Indian economic policy with regard to industrial growth is supported by many voluntary organisations, especially those in the field of vocational training which ends up serving industry. In the agricultural sector, many voluntary agencies are concentrating on the follow-up or enforcement of the green- revolution strategy. They do not consider the land distribution pattern. So their approach ends up by making the rich farmers richer, and the poor landless poorer.

The voluntary agencies that are involved in the education sphere, are mostly the church organisations. But the education they are providing is mainly of an elite, Western type. In the rural areas, the Church schools are training children mainly for white collar jobs, which end up by causing a brain drain from the villages. The health system that many voluntary agencies adopt is one that caters to the multinational pharmaceutical industry. Forty percent of hospital beds in our country are found in Church-run hospitals. They could have brought about a change, but they went into the growth approach which has made them and health care more and more costly!

A corollary to the growth approach is the introduction of democratic institutions like Cooperatives. In the initial stages, these were Open Cooperatives, whose membership was open

to all and sundry. But later on, when experience showed that these were dominated by the rich, voluntary agencies moved towards the target group oriented cooperatives, which were meant only for the poorer groups. But inequality is still found among them. Many have become exclusive clubs which have closed the doors to more members, even though these belong to the most needy sectors of society. They have concentrated on economic growth. But values of sharing, community concern, etc. are missing.

These growth-oriented programmes can be divided in those in which there is no functional education and those which provide this kind of education. Again, there are some in which there is no participation at all by the community while in others there is a varying degree of this participation. The groups working with this approach would have better contact with people than government officials, therefore they are more successful in their work than the government community development officials.

The success of the efforts of these groups is in proportion to their concentrating on human development rather than physical targets and lay main stress on training of people for continuing effort than on technical inputs. Success also depends on the level of people's participation in the entire process and the emphasis these groups lay on tapping local resources before seeking outside help.

### **3. Critical Awareness Building and People's Organisations**

The next category of social action groups have progressed further from this participation. They have been able to form animators from among the local people. Through these animators primarily a relationship is built between the agency and the people. Their primary objective is awareness building with the enabling of people's organisations. These are with or without any development programmes. Their primary goal is liberation of the people through the transformation of society.

Among these groups the term 'Liberation' is preferred to 'development' because the issue is power. People are oppressed, victims of power. Within and between individuals,

there are structures of dominating power which exploit people. The struggle is to break fetters of oppression.

The word 'Development' on the other hand, was put into use by rich nations, comparing themselves as developed and the poorer countries as 'developing' as if the difference was quantitative and the reasons unrelated. In this context, more appropriate terms would be 'domination' and 'dependence'. This domination is not only by the richer nations but also by the elite of the developing countries in alliance with them.

The interests of the Western nations and the indigenous elite are not served by a development strategy based on the concept of basic needs. Such a strategy would be productive and equitable for indigenous markets, not for the western ones. The elite has created a subservient state, dependent on a close alliance with foreign powers and oppressive states, in order to keep our people submissive to their purpose.

The groups that opt for this justice approach aim first of all at the fulfillment of basic needs with regard to food, clothing, shelter, education, health and employment. Their driving force is justice and sharing. They are fully convinced of the essential political dimension of the work for liberation and development of the poor and oppressed majority of the Indian population. Hence, some of them are semi-political action groups. Others are aiming at becoming Non Party Political Formations (NPPF). There are still others who are nothing else than front organisations of political parties.

#### **4. People's Movements : A Source of Hope**

There are other groups which concentrate solely on building up people's movements along the road of politicisation. They emphasise mobilisation of the people, their education through the building of people's awareness and the formation and full participation by the people in their own organisations. They work for a people's movement, in which the people are actually the activists, that is, the primary agents of their own liberation.

Politicisation is taken further in some places, when the people's movement develops relationships and cooperates with particular political parties and when, in revolutionary situations, becomes absorbed in the total national struggle.

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These last two processes involve participation in a struggle for state power.

But it must be noted that there are varied attitudes to people's movements among the voluntary agencies that purport to catalyse them. In fact, in many instances, questions can be raised about whether they are really initiated by the voluntary agency. Many are the cases where a people's sangham has already been existing before the agency took over. The agency coopts it, and proclaims it especially to the donor agency as a sangham of its creation. In the process, it destroys its authenticity, and unfortunately, converts the sangham into a kind of executive branch that implements on its behalf what had been planned by the collusion of resource and voluntary agencies, without the involvement of the people themselves.

Hence, the underlying issue is: who really takes the real and vital decisions? - Is it the agencies, both funding and implementing, or the people? As it stands today, in most of the cases, the decisions are taken by the resource agencies and the project holder. Too often, the latter is subtly oriented to the decision of the donor agency, because he or she still has the vestiges of the traditional colonial value system adhering on, so that he or she becomes subservient to every desire, spoken or unspoken, by the representative of the foreign funding agency.

However, in the midst of such a dehumanising socio-economic and political situation and the far-spreading deviation among voluntary social work agencies from their pristine commitment to the people, we can still discover a ray of hope. The deep longing of the marginalised to be free, cannot be stifled for too long. We find that many of the neglected and oppressed poor have begun to mobilise their dormant power, assert their inalienable right to participate in decision-making processes and establish their legitimate role in the transformation of society. The widespread emergence of militant peasant and dalit (harijan) movements, tribal movements, civil right, women and youth movements, ecological movements, are clear indications of the rising consciousness of the grassroots people as relevant political forces.

These movements are viewed as threats to the designs of the ruling classes and their allied vested interests. They project

these legitimate struggles as a law-and-order problem and as endangering national security. They enact laws to curb these movements. Directly or indirectly, the landlords and other powerful sectors, through their private armies and hordes of rowdies or goondas, unleash a reign of terror in the countryside and in the cities. The police frequently intrude into the civil life of the citizens, especially those who constitute the poorest section of society. All these efforts are designed at suppressing the genuine aspirations and legitimate dissent of the people.

## **5. The Key issue oriented Networking Approach**

During the past decade, several efforts have been made to build up networks of voluntary agencies so that they might be able to devise a common ideology and strategy, that they might be able to work together in a coordinated fashion to build a people's movement. But these have not met with any success. Rather in most cases, these have become nothing else than middlemen's club where the representatives of the voluntary agencies meet from time to time, discuss certain issues and exchange notes about their own programmes. There has not yet been any trickling down of this networking to the people to form a vaster people's movement encompassing all the programmes of the members of these networks.

Each group has its own orientation, dynamism, approach and selection of development sector, whether it be health, agriculture, education, etc. or concerned with a specific issue.

Obviously therefore, they are not concerned about the issues others are involved in. In many programmes, women or ecology are sorely neglected. Hence, there has been a move towards building up networks of voluntary action groups working on specific issues.

Today there are several such groups, known as Transformative Action Groups, each working on specific issues like human rights and peace, ecological issues, the feminist issue, and alternative professional associations (fighting their own establishments and working at grassroots), and legal aid groups. This issue orientation cuts across various social - and economic - divisions of society. Hence there is a possibility that

this kind of networking will draw much bigger numbers on each issue and therefore have a greater chance of building up on public opinion and bringing about a change in society with respect to specific issues and problems.

## **6. Value Oriented Approach**

It is now realised that unless the suprastructure, that is the attitudes, values, and behaviour patterns are changed, other changes in society or in individuals can be meaningless. Hence there is a new thrust on human values which run counter to the present culture of modernisation. Allied to this, among some of the groups which are working towards a change of values, is found the need of developing a spiritual basis for their work. This basis is not necessarily a religious one but is rooted in an acceptance that the human person is not a mere material being but a being endowed with a spiritual dimension, which cannot be ignored if perseverance and commitment are to be sustained in one's work for the transformation of society.

### **What makes a Voluntary Organisation come into Being?**

It would be quite right to say that these various approaches flow from the different ways in which the agency people understand the problem that they intend to tackle through their work. If they see the problem as one of poverty, charity would be the approach called for. If it is a process of people working for their own development, they work for community participation. This is intensified towards local animators and people's movement insofar as the agency sees its own role as purely that of a catalyst aiding the people as and when they need its help in educating and organising them. In other words, the analysis a group makes of society on a micro and macro level and its ideology determine the approach and strategy to bring about the transformation of society.

In the socio-political world, there are several and even contradictory opinions about voluntary agencies. Some people, represented by social analysts like Kothari, Sheth, Sethi, etc. see them as searching for and discovering new and alternative approach to development. They attribute the growth of action groups to the socio-economic and political crises affecting Indian society since the late 60's (Cf. Rajni

Kothari). D.L. Sethi says, "these groups are a reflection of a growing disenchantment with traditional roles and organisations and are attempts by alienated sections to bring meaning and relevance into their actions".

By and large, these social analysts would agree that there are some valuably positive aspects to be noted regarding voluntary agencies. They are capable of reaching the inaccessible people in the most remote part of the country. They will go to places where no government official has set foot and no official jeep has been driven. Also voluntary agencies have been able to take risks beyond the possibilities of the government machinery and through their success in risky ventures have been able to provide indications for future Government attempts. Finally, voluntary agencies have also shown and continue to show that many Government systems, approaches and schemes do not work and are not capable of working because of inherent obstacles.

Others, many leftist analysts like Omveldt and the CPM, see them as reformist deviations, attacking politics and leftist parties and defusing class struggle. The CPM, in particular, avers that imperialism utilises Action Groups and Voluntary agencies to halt its decline. Other leftists hold that these groups are part of world-wide radical and humanist movement in the Christian world. The RSS looks at the voluntary sector as the outcome of a plot of Christians to break up Hindu society.

### **III. OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS**

#### **1. The Feudal Kingdom Phenomenon**

Many voluntary agencies have become generally centralised in power. Their directors have turned autocratic, and there seems to be no semblance of democracy in any of their relationships with their workers. Their culture seems very clearly to be feudal. Their background prepares them for this feudalistic culture, in which knowledge is power, so if it is shared with one's co-workers or the people, it will be diminished. Hence knowledge and ideology are only transferred to the staff and people through orders and instructions.

Obviously, in such programmes, there is very little identity of the director and personnel of the agency with the people. To the people, the persons of the agency are as a matter of fact, mere middlemen. They are the new thekedars, and landlords. They have replaced the money lenders and the powerful in the villages. Because of their life style and easy access to money, they are often seen by people as exploiters and carpet baggers.

At the other end, this feudal spirit has developed a sort of landlordism insofar as the agency, both its director and personnel treat what they call their "target population" as their property or serfs whom they use as well as protect. This has led to a process of charity. They dole out what they believe the people need for their sustenance and development in the way of health, education and employment opportunities. As a consequence, a deep sense of dependency on and even subservience to them has developed among the poor and oppressed. This has, in a number of places, still continued, together with a complete absorption by the people of the culture, values and attitudes of the agency. Unfortunately, this attitude of subservience is also shared or has become, to some extent, transferred towards the resource agencies and their representatives who visit India.

#### **2. The Institutionalising of Development**

This feudal mentality together with the easy availability of considerable resources has made many voluntary agencies develop into large Institutions, some of which

can very naturally be called parallel governments. And with the evolution of these big, sometimes massive institutions, it is very clear that the original idea which caused the start of the process has been buried under quantities of bureaucratic procedures and red tape which betray a total disregard of human persons.

This disregard causes the agency to see people as statistics and numbers. Emphasis is laid on uniformity and discipline among the members of the agency and among the people. The agency becomes, as it were like the Roman god Janus. It faces both ways. The message it stands for is a promise of freedom. But because it has developed into an institution, it takes on the life of its own, requiring and laying stress on stability, protection to grow and centralisation. Gradually the agency becomes rigid and starts to support the 'status quo'. It is very important that large agencies watch for the moment when the structure becomes more important than the goal, when the institution makes its members forget the vision of a transformed society. It is time, then, to return to the message.

Within such a framework of opinion and attitude, it does happen that the directors and workers of a voluntary agency do not feel the necessity to analyse the present socio-economic, political and ideological forces that are at work in India or to understand the implications of these forces. They seem to be under the impression that their institution would have good contacts with the Government and ruling power and be strong enough to withstand these forces. They are carried away by very simplistic notions about the society and perform a social action which expresses itself in a paternalistic attitude to the poor. Beside all this indicates a close affiliation to the rich and the powerful.

This institutionalism is a heavy barrier to a real developmental approach. It has led to a dereliction of active concern for the plight of the oppressed and downtrodden. Many are the issues and events in recent history that manifest this lack of concern. The voluntary agencies of India, by and large, have not raised any voice of protest against the grave and oppressive situations prevalent in the country. To take the most recent events, the silence of the voluntary sector with regard to the

repercussions of the Mandal Commission report throughout the country, and with regard to the Ramjanmabhoomi- Babri Masjid issue is strikingly noticeable!

### **3. Not sufficiently Identified with the Poor**

Over-emphasising the institutional reality of their agencies, the ones who are in authority often endeavour to bolster it through material resources, and in their anxious quest for security, have given the impression of a worldliness that seems to compete with the multinational corporations. This adversely affects the credibility of the voluntary agency when it proclaims its objective to transform society, to show concern for the downtrodden and work for justice.

Added to this, because of the type of education they have received which is a legacy of colonialism, their style of life is a positive point when dealing with representatives of funding agencies, who relate more easily to them because of similarity of tastes, culture, language and interests. But it alienates them from the poor, who see them as foreign to their own life style, culture of poverty and way of looking at the day-to-day realities of life. The image the leaders and some of the personnel of these agencies project is that of opulence. This is another reason why the development programmes they plan are not people-based. Rather, they draw on what these voluntary agency personnel, from a remote view point deriving from their academic-oriented university social work courses, think the people need. For them, development means raising the living standards of the people, while the people's participation in planning, decision-making implementation and management of the development projects is not considered seriously.

Today, more than ever, there is need for the social worker, if he is to be considered an activist, to be more committed to the poor and impoverished people in our country. There is need not only for reform but for a process of liberation by which the poor regain their dignity and help to build a more just and fraternal society.

### **4. Burnt Out Social Workers**

In the beginning of the nineties, we find two kinds of social workers in the voluntary sector. Some work at an impressive speed, contribute hugely and go on working till retirement or

death parts them from their work. Their spirit remains undaunted, their creativity undiminished, their commitment to the poor ardent.

But there are others, unfortunately too many, who have been working for more than a decade who have now wilted after their long spurt of enthusiasm. Their contributions have waned, they seem to have turned a shadow of their former robust selves. After years of fruitful work conducting education programmes for the people and helping them to organise themselves, sometimes these social workers have suddenly found it a chore rather than a pleasure. They no longer enjoy what they have relished for a long time. Their duties seem a burden, the relationships feel joyless. If there are problems, they seem infinitely wearying; if there aren't, there seems to be no remaining challenge. Their batteries have been drained too long without a recharge.

What happens to these people? What causes their lamentable burnout? Essentially, it is because they do not get the sustenance they need to replenish the energy they have been using up. People need food and rest to recuperate whether they are running a marathon or an intensive social work programme. Those physical needs are paralleled by mental and emotional needs that too demand refilling. Doctors cannot remain good doctors if they have no further access to medical knowledge once they have completed medical school. This is not simply because of obsolescence of knowledge due to new findings. It is more because their prior knowledge starts blurring without the renewing contact of new knowledge, their mind starts losing its edge without the regular honing of new learning.

It is the same with the social activist. His work is a multi-faceted one. It involves knowing and exercising skills in enabling people to become critically aware, making structural analysis, organising themselves. It involves making decisions, solving problems, preparing plans and enabling people to do the same. It involves animation, assessing, developing and caring for people. The demands on both intellectual and emotional planes are often enormous. So are the possibilities of bleak burnout.

The first sign of burnout is dissatisfaction, profound and

prolonged Motivated social activists find even routines reassuring, crises exhilarating; everything they look at appear full of promise and excitement. Burnout changes all that. Hours look long, duties exacting, those in authority in the agency critical, colleagues unreliable, grassroots people unreasonable, travel to places of work tedious.

The second sign of burnout is depletion, a sense of being exhausted from the labour of mobilising people and working on determined and time-bound strategies and meeting targets. Social activists feel drained, empty of new ideas, their creative juices evaporated. They sense themselves part of a charade, where they act out gestures with perfunctory precision but the result has long ceased to have any personal meaning.

The third sign of burnout is depersonalisation, a deliberate distancing from other people. The essence of the work of social activists is to build up valuable links with others, both in the agency as well as among the grassroots people. It is vital that they have personal knowledge of the people they are working with. But after years of working in many cases, the people become mere statistics to be dealt with, to be achieved as measures of success. Burnout brings growing alienation from them; sometimes doubts and distrust, sometimes deep dislike and depreciation. All their anger and frustration are focused on the people around them. It is tragic that many of the voluntary agencies have lost their pristine vision and therefore are being passively spun around in a whirlpool of activism. This has led to a depletion of motivation and a strengthening of institutionalism, where regulations, organisational structure, activity and success, no matter in what direction, have taken precedence over persons. The ones who suffer most from this are the personnel at the lower levels in the voluntary agency. Very often, they are victims of the injustice and inequality that the agency professes to work for among the poorest of the poor. Just before us at this moment, is a project proposal. Looking at the budget we find:

Salary of Director	Rs. 6,000
Further along the budget we see the following:	
Salary of Senior Accountant	Rs.1,500
Agricultural Officer	Rs.1,000
Sweeper (Part time)	Rs.30

A deeper analysis of this phenomenon of burnout indicates that there has not been a refurbishing of the spirit while the social activists have been spending themselves in their work with the people. It is generally found that many of those who have opted to work for social action especially in the way of transforming the system linked up the injustice in this system with their traditional religious beliefs and practices. Hence they have given up these beliefs and practices. But they have linked spirituality with these religious elements, and in discarding religion, they have also discarded spirituality. Throwing away the baby with the bath-water, they have become impoverished because they have starved an important dimension of their personality.

Every human being needs a spiritual aspect to motivate and give dynamism to his or her actions, especially if these are in the area of working for justice in the world. In this sphere, there are bound to be many and deep set-backs, failures and disappointments, leading very often to despair. But only a spirituality which involves a faith in one's fellow human beings, however suppressed they be, a hope built on their potential to read and write their own history and a love of those who eke out their existence in inhuman conditions. It is essential that one recognises these people as worth of equal dignity as oneself. It is only when one is able to discern the divinity in the other, be he or she poor, neglected or oppressed, that one's spirituality will provide the elan and vitality to keep on working with the poor and marginalised of our society.

## **5. Fear of Conflict**

The next most debilitating factor on the part of many voluntary agencies, especially those who have not made an adequate analysis and are content with welfare or economic programmes is a mistaken understanding of the function of conflict. Conflict is thought of as something undesirable and as such to be avoided at all costs. Many social workers, and even those who term themselves activists, think that change leading to greater justice can be effected by conversion of heart of the exploiters towards the exploited. But they ignore the fact that at no time in history has social justice been realised through conversion of heart of the dominant classes

of society. Rather, it has been realised when the exploited have become aware of their situation and have struggled unitedly for their God-given rights. Because of its efforts to avoid conflict, a social work agency runs the risk of becoming flabby and apathetic.

When we say that conflict is needed in order to bring about authentic social transformation, we do not imply that conflict means violence, nor that it justifies the extremities of violence that have actually broken out in some instances. We would rather stress that conflict or confrontation in itself is not wrong and that violence can be avoided if the exploited are made aware of their actual situation and its root cause, and if they are united and organised in sufficiently large numbers.

"The significant thing about the division between rich and poor people, rich and poor nations, is not simply that one has the resources to provide comfort for all its citizens and the other cannot provide basic needs and services. The reality and depth of the problem arises because the man who is rich has power over the lives of those who are poor, and the rich nation has power over the policies of those which are not rich. And even more important is that our social and economic system, nationally and internationally, supports those divisions and constantly increases them, so that the rich get ever richer and more powerful, while the poor get relatively poorer and less able to control their own future.

My purpose today is to suggest to you that ... the development of people means rebellion. At a given and decisive point in history, people decide to act against these conditions which restrict their freedom as people. I am suggesting that unless we participate actively in the rebellion against those social structures and economic organisations which condemn people to poverty, humiliation and degradation, ... (we) will serve no purpose comprehensible to the modern world..." (Julius Nyerere : Freedom and Development, pp.214.)

The voluntary agency and the social activist have to help people rebel against the inhuman conditions in their villages and in their slums; they have to help people to do this in the most effective way it can be done. But above all, they must be obviously and openly fighting all those institutions and power groups, which contribute to the existence and maintenance of

the physical and spiritual slums - regardless of the consequences to themselves. The social activists must work with the people in building a future based on social justice. They must participate actively in initiating, securing and creating the changes which are necessary. Their love for the people must be expressed in action against evil and for good. For, if the social work organisation acquiesce in established evils, it is identifying itself with injustice by its continuing presence.

## **6. The Ideological Deficiencies of Social Work Agencies**

The ideological basis of many social work organisations in general, too, does not help them to become agents for social transformation. Their ideology is rooted in a capitalist, society based on competition, free market and the cultural and economic homogenisation based on Western patterns which is taking place today in Eastern Europe.

They need a new ideology which is oriented to the people, to enable them to think for themselves, form their own associations and unions, decide for themselves in every aspect of their human existence and have an equal right to the opportunity to avail themselves of the human and natural resources of the society of which they are citizens.

But if this new ideological line is accepted, it would mean, as one social work agency leader told the writer,, "we will not have the right to continue living as we have been, and we shall be forced to change!" The urge or desire to change has always been and will ever be one faced by resistance, both on the individual and societal levels. But the important thing to bear in mind is that commitment to justice demands conversion not only of head and of heart, but also of praxis - a total moving away from whatever is self-centred and unjust, from indifference and lethargy to the building up of a society of justice and peace, of love and understanding, of mercy and solidarity.

However, this praxis is not easily accepted, for it would also mean that values which have now become traditional, namely the ones deriving from capitalism, like consumerism, competition, prestige, self-aggrandisement, etc., and other

aspects of Western civilisation have to be subjected to a critical evaluation. All conservative tendencies are engaged in preserving the life style they have grown accustomed to. For them, sin and evil are not recognised in the realm of economics. Rather, they would find sin mainly in the sphere of sexuality and in the legalistic observance of ritual, not in the societal acceptance, whether silent or expressed, of the injustice and inequality prevalent today.

Often stereotyped formulae and cliches have been pretexts for escaping the responsibility of facing up to the facts and to those who hold the reins of power in the social work organisations. Servile conformity to a system of traditional interpretation for fear of incurring the displeasure of authorities and losing F.C.R.A. numbers, positions and privileges has kept many social activists silent. This silence has contributed to the justification and the consequent perpetuation of injustices and has encouraged authoritarian practices.

## **7. Lack of Sufficient Analysis**

A very common weakness that leads to deviations from the authentic development priorities and policies of some agencies in India is the lack of a previous sufficient analysis or the lack of an on-going deepening and contextualising of the original analysis with which they started the programme. Added to this, a surprisingly large percentage of these social work organisations manifest a lack of clear conspectus for the future.

Because of the absence of a real analysis of the structure of our society, these social service agencies do not see the real root cause of the under-development and oppression which prevails. Even if they do, they are unable to tackle the issues that are relevant at the present. Their sight is focussed only on the present, hence they follow an ad-hoc approach, which may seem very pragmatic and appears to be leading to immediate results, but may not be effective in the long run in view of enabling the people to achieve greater self-reliance and power.

A social worker of repute who is constantly in contact with various development programmes in India and abroad, complained that "If you ask me about the various social work

programmes I know of, I can say without hesitation that a surprising number of them are not based on an in-depth analysis. They may be based on the 'felt needs' of the people, but not on analysed needs. Very little attempt is made to find out whether the implementation of a particular programme will ultimately help the weaker sections to gather enough momentum firstly to retain the gains out of the programme or even to steer themselves upstream subsequently." It was quite a jolt recently to hear in an important regional conference, a woman, director of a women's development programme, who has been quite a leading light in the development field in her state, declare publicly, "I do not believe in wasting time on analysis!"

Survey and programme planning, more often than not, tend to be more alert to the reaction of the donor agency than the people concerned. Consequently, many of the social service organisations tend to develop sophisticated programmes which do not allow the people's organisation to have its natural organic growth.

A clear vision and coherent ideology are an essential factor for authentic development. As one social worker picturesquely said, "Many forces have been on the battlefield, but were not winners because they lacked a strong ideology." Their grassroots work may in some instances be remarkable, but because of a lack of overall vision, they achieve nothing in the line of social transformation. Rather, they often become a screen or even a force that orients the people in the wrong direction. They are, to quote one social worker, "building roads, but not knowing where these roads lead."

This lack of analysis has had and can still have grave consequences for social work as this extract from a statement by three hundred social activists of Brazil stresses:

"It is in the framework of paternalism that many people approach present-day realities and social problems. ... They establish countless charitable organisations, social programmes and money campaigns. They universally launch philanthropic initiatives that are dear to the middle-class, because the latter can thereby work off their feelings of guilt and the responsibility they bear for the gap which separates their standard of living from that of the impoverished people

around them. People try to alleviate the effects produced without tackling the causes behind them. In practice, the line of action of many social work agencies makes them **ACCOMPLICES IN THE BRUTAL EXPLOITATION** of the people and in the misguided effort to solve poverty and illness on an individual level."

## **8. Isolation and Lack of Unity**

Another problem is the lack of unity and collaboration between various social service organisations in India. In fact, there is a very definite isolation prevailing among the organisations aided by the different foreign resource agencies, almost bordering on rivalry. Barring a few exceptions, there is very little coordination or cooperation among the organisations of a particular region, much less, among the various states. Such collaboration would generally be looked upon with suspicion as weakening the autonomy of each organisation, or rather, of its director.

Underlying this isolation is the feudal attitude which we referred to earlier. This is prevalent in most development organisations. It has been noticed that very often, when a person in charge of a development organisation receives the necessary funds from a resource agency for running its programme, he feels a sense of power over money as well as over people. He builds his kingdom, in which he reigns isolatedly from other organisations. In fact, we would in no way be exaggerating if we say that many such directors look upon other development agencies as "rival kingdoms"!

This was very clearly manifested in an incident where we were involved in an evaluation of a development programme. We found that one village was struggling with a problem which had been solved a little earlier in another village in a different programme in the same district. We suggested to the director of the programme we were evaluating, that he could send a delegation from the village where the problem existed to visit the villagers who had solved the same problem. Through a discussion with these villagers, they could perhaps find a way to resolving their own difficulty.

The villagers were sent and they discussed with the other villagers, and found an appropriate solution to their problem.

But promptly, a letter was sent from the director of this other organisation, asking the first director how he could dare to send his people into the area of his programme without asking his permission. Ironically, both the directors belonged to a network of voluntary agencies, founded to improve cooperation among these agencies. One of these directors, -the one who wrote the letter of protest, - was the treasurer of this network!

## **9. Alien Model of Development**

A problem that exists in many programmes in India is that these are not patterned on an indigenous model of development. After the Second World War, the Western countries were rehabilitated through the Marshal Plan, by means of the import of institutions and of an economic system from America. When these countries initiated a process of development aid for the Third World in the Sixties, they believed that the same approach would be effective. They therefore followed the general development trend of transferring of institutions, especially like technical training schools, and others that had been successful and relevant in the First World, expecting them to be as relevant to the Third World.

The model of development generally accepted by most voluntary organisations is not relevant to our country. This model normally demands planning that is made at least a year ahead. Such a planning disregards the actual situation of the people at the grassroots whose lives depend on circumstances that often are unpredictable. Practically speaking, if they, or we with them, could plan beforehand, they would not be poor! If we consider the national policy of development, we will see the same phenomenon, namely, that the model adopted by our country needs competent experts and bureaucrats versed in Western models of development. Since our bureaucrats and experts are not sufficiently versed in these models, they are manipulated and exploited by imported Western technocrats.

Influenced by the First World, and especially by the foreign resource agencies, nearly all the voluntary groups involved in development work in India, as in other Third World countries, have willingly accepted this approach. For example, they have taken up the health system that came from the West and was adopted by the Indian government, and even ran them better

than the government. The traditional community-based health system which relied almost entirely on indigenous medicines which had stood the test of centuries in our country was totally neglected.

The flow of technology linked with aid from the First World goes on at present to a great extent. Not only does it ignore the indigenous health systems, but also all other development and community oriented approaches that might be perhaps more effective. In fact, this borrowing of Western approaches to development can be deleterious to our country, even though our rulers and experts may be unaware of or ignore its ill-effects. One example that stands out at the moment of writing is the fact that the World Bank is giving 543 crores for sericulture. Has it, or we for that matter, raised the following questions about this plan: What is the implication of mulberry culture for the poor? What is the implication of mulberry culture for the voluntary agencies in income generation?

Only a voluntary agency that is naive implements this programme - and efficiently! Has it even tried to study how injurious to the soil is the planting of mulberry? It is tragic that while the World Bank comes with poison we take it because it keeps us working for the next five years! We do not feel it is healthy to have such a sense of dependence on whatever we receive from the First World, as though it is the spring from which all our development will flow. It is good to remember in this context that the nett outflow from Third World to the First World through loans, business and the transnational corporations is far more than the aid that the Third World receives from First World!

We are all aware of movements that spring up in various parts of the world, as it were spontaneously, capturing the imagination and enthusiasm of the grassroots people and spreading over a vast area. Such, for example, were the movement for freedom in the Philippines in 1986, and those of the Blacks in South Africa.

Coming to India, we find the J.P movement of Total Revolution in the early seventies, the Telengana movement before that, and the Chipko movement in north India and the Apiko movement in Karnataka. These movements developed from among the local people, without the help of foreign aid or

development organisations. They were real people's movements. We ask ourselves why they could be so much more successful than the efforts of so many development agencies who have been working for so many years with a heavy expenditure by way of personnel, energy, time and financial resources. Is it not because they followed a pattern of inspiration and action that was totally indigenous to the people?

We have to admit that in the development programmes of many social service organisations, whether they be aimed at development of agricultural methods, or dealing with community building, construction of houses or even of latrines, the orientations of the programme derive from the West. The major reason for this is that the decision for the type of programme, its approach, its strategy and its implementation is very often left to the representative of the resource agency. This agency provides the funds, therefore, the Indian social work agency director takes it that he must call the tune in all aspects of the work!

It so happens that the local partner will almost inevitably design and organise the activities of his programme to suit the donor. Each foreign resource or aid agency, has its own procedures, priorities, criteria, pattern of decision-making, reporting and evaluation. Most of the Third World partners tend to tailor their activities in the form of a "project" that is, a concise, planned activity calculated to take place over a limited number of years and aiming for certain measurable results.

In spite of a latitude that may be offered by the aid agency, the natural stream of improving and responding to an ever-changing environment and to the changing needs of the people is frozen into some blue-print and both donor and implementing agencies tend to restrict themselves to examining whether future activities match the proposed project plan instead of looking at their overall impact, also outside the project.

Such an approach requires a leadership in a voluntary organisation which comes from the higher strata of society, for it calls for a high level of managerial and planning skill. It introduces a way of thinking and decision-making that does not usually help for real participation by the lower echelons of

workers in the voluntary agency, and much less by the people at the grassroots. What is worse is that however much insistence is placed on the people's participation, the whole thinking pattern and cultural frame work underlying this 'project' approach is alien to the native ethos and mind-set of the rural people of India.

Another problem that can, and in some cases, does arise, is the possible backlash of receiving foreign aid for development. It is a well known fact of experience that if one has the right contacts or knows how to write a good project proposal, he can have easy access to money from the foreign aid agencies. A statement made by one social worker is worth reflecting upon: "so far as the money is coming in, institutions grow, - but not movements. Leadership may grow, but it is not the people's leadership."

There is an urgent need to relate to people in new ways : believing in them, identifying with them, opening the programmes to them. Only thus could the social activist and the people together experience a whole new process of arousing and motivating and analysing, or mobilising inactive people and systematising scattered ideas. It is only in this way that there can be a continuing dialogue in which all become more critical of conditions, more knowledgeable about causes, more ready to act collectively. Only through this new kind of relationship, could the activist and people together contribute to the creation of a new community, when everyone who is really involved in the actual situation will have participated in the process of shaping and attaining their destiny as people.

Development strategies are too often unrealistic, due to a lack of comprehensive socio-economic-political and cultural analysis in the area of the programme operation and because social work agency leadership has not really come to grips with issues of development, the struggles for justice and the need for social transformation.

## **10. Attitude of the Government to the Voluntary Sector**

The Government's policy relating to voluntary agencies is clearly moving towards curtailing their autonomy, divesting them of the identify, and making them agents of the system,

instead of being true champions of the people's rights and interests. The F.C.R.A. number is used as a sword of Damocles over the heads of all voluntary agencies who are working for true development in trying to give power to the people. We are all aware of several instances where this number has been revoked from an organisation. The reasons given are often either non-existent or vague and irrelevant. Trying to fight against the irrational decision by the Government in revoking the number only ends up in a monstrous waste of time, energy and money, besides causing a lull and often an undoing of the people's movement that might have been initiated by the agency.

The role of the voluntary agency is seen as complementary and supplementary to the Government. Besides, it is expected, according to some government documents on the subject, to act or to help the people to act as "watchdog" to see that Government programmes are properly and justly implemented. But if and when the voluntary agency has fulfilled this role, the Government has come down heavily upon it, and has in several cases, vindictively withdrawn its FRCA number on some very specious grounds.

There is growing opposition to voluntary agencies from various vested interests in the political sphere. In many cases, discussions with MLAs and other politicians are to no avail. These politicians see the work of the voluntary agencies as a taking over of the area of their operation, for they have a reduced space of underdevelopment which they can use as objects of future promises they can make at election time! Because they receive foreign funds for their activities, voluntary agencies are dubbed "CIA agents" or many similar invectives showered on them. The traditional ones, mostly those belong to religious groups, who dole out charity are treated more benignly by the Government and those in power.

The alternative to using foreign funds for development work is getting government funds. But getting cooperation of the Government in running the programme and more, in the obtaining of funds are beset with tremendous bureaucratic difficulties. The bribes demanded by various petty officials to get the programme through and the actual transfer of the needed funds drain the effectiveness of the programmes. Besides, once the first installment is received, one can never

be sure whether the subsequent ones may come at the time when they are urgently needed or whether they come at all! This procedural delay is so regular that one is tempted to ask whether the deliberate intent of the Government it is to make the people lose faith in the voluntary agency which has started work with them and then is unable to continue it when it reaches a critical state.

## **11. Management Orientation to Development**

While the seventies saw the growth of many grassroots groups committed to the cause of justice, the eighties gave birth to a new breed of development workers. These have made us realise that the voluntary sector was no longer Gandhian, unprofessional and woolly-headed about issues. The new breed was more yuppie, professional and technology-oriented. The men and women of action have been replaced by slick foreign-returned manipulators, who thrive on forming instant NGOS with no base and no roots. It is but to be expected that their knowledge of the national and micro-level situation will be superficial and based on third rate evidence. Mixed up in it were a lot of instant reformers, carpet baggers and people with hidden agendas who were taking the whole development process back to square one.

In many cases, the voluntary organisation is an income generating structure, sometimes directly contradictory to simplicity and without any vestige of identification or close rapport to the poor. It does not live as an example to the people. Besides, its personnel often speak of feminism, but live in direct contradiction in terms of relationship to their own wives, their female staff members and the village women.

There are several causes for this situation. But one of the striking ones is the business orientation to development that is growing all over in the voluntary sector. To some extent, this is due to influence of the foreign resource agency. There is no doubt that today, the distribution of resources for development from to the Third World has become a big business in the First World. The ambiance and culture of some of the resource agencies in the west is not very much different from that of the commercial firms functioning in the developed countries.

It is not just a matter of the sophisticated technology that is

used in these resource agency offices, but also the recruiting of top quality hi-tech specialists in them that are to some extent responsible for a impersonal business culture that is shared even by the representatives of these agencies who come to India. This culture is transferred by a kind of osmosis to their contacts in the voluntary organisations. The image that might be created by several voluntary organisations today is that they are like any other service sector, with a paid, not a voluntary staff, with a director and hierarchical management, and with strong tendencies to institutionalism. These organisations too are increasingly becoming business minded and impersonal in their dealings with the people who today are in a real sense reduced only to "target population" and "beneficiaries".

This culture has an impact on all the personnel of the development agency. Together with the reliance these people have on the financial resources that come from outside and the ease with which these resources are made available, they undergo social and psychological changes. They no longer feel the pinch of insecurity, they have secure jobs, with more than adequate salaries, they have managed to pick up quite a number of perks, linked up with their work, so that the equipment meant for the programmes are without any scruple monopolised by many of them, e.g. jeeps, vehicles, T.V. and video sets, cameras, etc.

If any organisation is truly committed to development, it is in the remote areas that it will put its best and most competent leaders and animators. But the Government and the social work agencies generally put the weakest there, sending the most competent to the metropolitan centres which have access to the above mentioned perks. This is the normal trend, and the only one exception we have recently come across was a dynamic leader of a social work organization from Pakistan who told the writer, "I am sending my best workers to the remotest areas"

The excess of funds that are poured out by the resource agencies are also, to a great extent, the cause for this deterioration and for the killing of the right motivation for social work. These agencies and their representatives, no matter how committed they may be to the cause of authentic development, are only transitory visitors, and it is impossible for them to really know the situation of a specific area or people for whom

a programme is run. The ease with which they can be manipulated by those who know the right jargon and the tricks of the trade makes them easy victims of developmental skullduggery. This is confirmed by the number of times we have actually witnessed their rejection of programmes which are sincerely and authentically people oriented, small budgeted, and low image ones, simply because the project holders who contact them are too simple, honest and straightforward. They do not speak the right jargon, they have not got the skills of sycophancy or adulation when relating to outsiders. Hence they do not make much of an impact on them.

Money has a tremendously powerful role in the carving out of decisions. Not only the money of the resource agency, but also the money at hand with the voluntary agency can to a great extent determine the kind of programme which is run in a project. The people too, are influenced by the money that flows into a project. They might see their need in a different area, but if money is being offered for a particular purpose, they will put aside that need and avail of the benefits of this money. Thus the whole process of development and liberation is diverted by the flow of money.

The workers in an agency are also influenced by money. Questions predominant in their minds are "Who will look after my family if I rely solely on sincerity and commitment? I cannot work without pay. But if I am to be paid, from where will the money come?" These questions ultimately lead to the same direction: power is where the money is!

The result of all this is that genuine 'voluntarism' is practically dead in our country. The voluntary agencies have, by and large, forgotten what they are really trying to do. They are oblivious to the problem of lack of continuity, either when the man on top is changed, or when the funds stop coming from abroad.

Neither are many of them concerned with moving from the micro- level to the macro-level. This is mainly because they have not developed a deep analysis of the socio-economic, political and cultural systems prevailing in our country and which necessarily have a continuous and strong impact on anything effected on the micro-level.

It is clear that what is needed is a deepening of motivation of

those working for the liberation of the poor and exploited people in our country. Fresh blood is required in all the voluntary sector, so that new motivation, enthusiasm and new strategies can be effected. There should definitely be a very great reduction in the dependence of funds, especially those coming from abroad. Of course, a major part of the problem would be solved if the foreign resource agencies discovered their authentic place in the process of development, realised their own limitations and gave much more importance to the knowledge and experience of people actually in the field, and not just to their mediators, who work from behind desks in the capital and other major cities of India.

As long as there is greed in the world and selfishness in the individual human person, all good things will become corrupt. Our good definition of development will also become corrupt and has to be redeemed. Is every voluntary agency prepared to have a second look at all that it thought was good : training programmes, cultures, ideology...?

## IV. VOLUNTARISM NOT DEAD!

While we have painted a rather gloomy picture of the voluntary agencies working for development in India, we can joyfully assert that there are many which have still preserved their pristine enthusiasm and selfless commitment to the poor and marginalised. There is an encouraging growth of voluntarism which has initiated the rise of several movements that we have already referred to, like those of the freedom movement, of women, tribals, Dalits, and the ecological and civil liberties movements. We can gladly say that also in the bureaucracy, we have come across several individuals with a vision for justice and a respect for the human person.

We can still see in India a number of people, old and young, working with the grassroots people. They are simple, dignified, genuine and exuding courage. They take obstacles in their stride and still maintain their optimism for the future. We are impressed by their laughing away failures and encouraging the bruised among themselves and among the people to look on the experience as an educative one.

The hope of the voluntary sector is in these individuals who are always willing to help, never pontificating and accessible to the misguided, the perplexed and the lonely looking for direction. They are the ones who will get no national or international awards, for they avoid crowds and public speeches and they see their life mission as oriented to assist without giving the impression of charity, to guide without being patronising, to prod, push and encourage the depressed and the deprived whose spirit had been broken, to mend and mend again without taking credit for the rehabilitation.

There are still some of this species left, and they are the ones in the villages and slums who will keep this country together, inject hope in the system and give reason for living in this great nation. At the village level there are hundreds of small struggling groups who receive funds from abroad and even from the Government. Many among them have been victimised, harassed and hounded by the police at the instigation of politicians, landlords and village dadas. Given a choice, many of them would still welcome funds from the government instead of foreign agencies because that would

give them credibility, but they are then not sure of their continuity and stability.

## **1. How do we see the role of Voluntary Agencies in the Nineties?**

At the outset, it is good to remind ourselves that development is more than economic growth. IT IS PEOPLE! Development is a process beginning and ending with the human person, requiring people's active and conscious participation. It is the grassroots people who must animate the whole process. Agencies and workers are only facilitators.

The topic "NGOs in the Nineties" is today being discussed in several voluntary agency circles. In most of them, we hear that there is need of very elaborate planning by voluntary agencies, that there must be a new form of collaboration with the funding agencies. Some agencies suggest that there must be a geo-political approach to development, and that there must be better management, administration, and organisation of the voluntary agency and of the voluntary sector in general. A resource agency, considering the expenses incurred for running small and big programmes, has decided that it is only going to aid big projects. The needs of the people are not the primary concern by the administrative costs of running programmes! Does this not forget the fundamental principle that the people are to be the planning subjects and the primary agents of their own development?

For the solution to the various problems that development agencies encounter, the answer is to be found, not on the top, not at the level of the agencies, but at the level of the people. We must go to the people. They are the ones who are really weighed down by the reality of poverty, deprivation, neglect, marginalisation and exploitation. The time has come for us to think again, in the right connotation that "WE the People" which is the first phrase of the Preamble to the Constitution, really means the people of India, the majority of whom are these poor and downtrodden masses.

Issues that the voluntary sector must tackle today

### **A. People's Organisation.**

When making people the primary agents of their development

and liberation, it is essential that we realise that our chief objective would be to enable them to organise themselves. The community of the grassroots people must be awakened, trained and **organised** to become strong and take their own future in hand. Unfortunately, in many voluntary agency circles, the word 'organisation' has become another cliché like conscientisation, participatory research, and today, human resource development! Activists say that they are organising the people when all they are doing is forming a small group of dynamic youth, or gathering people regularly to have talks or discussion on various topics relating to village life.

### **Genuine organisation implies a number of things:**

1. The action that is planned by the organised group must be done in ordered way, the work divided among different individuals who are responsible for its execution.
2. The leadership should be collective. Single leadership can be abused, sold, bought or destroyed.
3. There have to be regular meetings of ALL to take decisions and see to their execution.
4. Records of meetings must be maintained and read to see what has been executed, and who is responsible.
5. Tasks are evenly divided with all, be they young or old, men or women, being given their task. This used to be the case in organisation of traditional villages and families.
6. The community must raise at least part of its own resources, through voluntary labour, material, money. Sound accounting is essential, so that all know what is contributed, how it is spent, what remains and what is to be done with it.
7. The most **Essential** element in organisation is a **Spirit** of cooperation and unity. Power comes from **Unity**.

### **B. Building up of people's movements.**

Development is only going to be effective if it leads to the formation of a people's movement. For such movements, resources should be tapped locally and from the people themselves as far as possible. It has been proved that external resources deter any growth of authentic people's movements.

Community development and liberation, as well as social transformation must be the action of the people at the grassroots. It is they who must be the planning subjects, the primary agents and the authentic results of the whole liberation process. We who come from another background, are really outsiders, however much we might feel that we belong to them, and we must have the humility to accept that and give the power to them to be the primary agent of their liberation. All the social activist can do is to enable them to have a critical awareness of their situation and of their own potentialities and limitations. We must be catalysts in the process of their organisations and mobilising themselves. In this process, we have to realise that our possibilities are limited. We are working with the unorganised and are hopeful of organising them. But this organisation will not be big or strong enough to make a sufficient impact on the system.

We, the representatives of development voluntary organisations too often see ourselves as if we were some kind of saviours who have descended on earth and will be able to change it on our terms. We have not put ourselves in a realistic context. When we try to organise the unorganised, we find that since we have not a national united structure, our efforts are hamstrung. The people need an association that is already organised in order to get strength on a wider level. The only one they will find will be a political party which has a force that can have a national impact. We may be dismayed that the group we have been working with will go on to collaborate with a political party.

It is imperative that we have a critical perspective on this. We must enable the people we are working with to have a deeper perception which will bring to bear on the political party with which they are collaborating. Our role is an important one, though a preliminary "precursor" one. We have to organise the unorganised so that they can of their own freewill and decision join whatever organised institutions that exist and are powerful enough to help them effectively to win in their struggle for their rights.

## **C. NETWORKING**

To break away from the isolation that prevails among the

voluntary agencies, it is important that networks be initiated on two level : among voluntary agencies and groups and among the grassroots people's organisations. This seems to be most difficult in the present day feudal culture which is prevalent in the voluntary sector. Each agency vaunts itself to be doing the only thing that is required for development, and looks down on others which it considers as rivals. There is a tendency to build up kingdoms which are isolated from one another and which do not want to learn from one another. The seminar syndrome that seems to be current in the voluntary sector today does not help to bring people to work together. Most use it as a platform to publicise their ideologies and approaches. If they learn from others, it is only in the way of recipes - gimmicks and methods that can produce instant successes!

It is urgent that a spirit of humility find its way into the voluntary sector, so that each voluntary agency will see itself as part of a whole process that aims at bringing about a union and movement of the people. It must realise that this movement will only come about when the agencies are united in purpose, ideology, approach and strategies.

#### **D. Issue Orientation rather than Programmes**

It is realised today that instead of working on projects and programmes, there is a real need to concentrate on the burning issues of our times. These are for example the three weakest sectors of society : women, Dalits and tribals. The issue of the urban poor too needs concentrating on. Communalism and Fundamentalism have to be fought against and efforts must be made to discover the right meaning of secularism and make the people aware of it. Secularism as it exists today, is guided and controlled by the elite and has become a tool or weapon in the hands of the elite for their vested interest. This is the reason behind all communalism. The ecological issue cannot be neglected, if we want to save our planet for our coming generations.

#### **E . Alternative Approaches**

Fortunately, there is a trend among a rather small number of voluntary agencies to try to rediscover alternate development approaches, deriving from the traditional ones which are lost.

Such are for example, ecological and organic farming and tree cropping methods, soil conservation, water harvesting, etc. already in the people's culture. Also earlier infant survival methods, e.g. alternate health care are being rediscovered and propagated. Groups are coming together to focus on drought, and search for alternatives with regard to agriculture, etc., which have in early times been used by our people in the villages when they prepared themselves for drought and disaster by means of very simple but effective approaches.

## **F. Value Formation**

Today, a new phase is coming through very strongly in the development field. It is being realised that development will have absolutely no meaning unless it is rooted in a formation and recapturing of human values. This is going to be a terribly uphill task, given the fact that the values of modernisation have captured not only the elite, but also the poorest person in the most remote village in our country. The TV and other media have created a culture of consumerism, and this culture will automatically annihilate any progress that will have been made in the line of development of the poorest and neglected sectors of our society. The tragic reality is that this culture of modernisation which concretely manifests itself in consumerism has permeated the voluntary sector itself to a very great extent!

## **2. The Image of the Voluntary Sector Today**

Finally, it is urgent that the voluntary sector enhances its public image. There is need for a better deal in voluntary agencies especially with regard to its integrity. A voluntary agency's credibility is derived from the congruence of its vision, objectives and its activities, the transparency of what it is, what it intends to do, and how the work is accomplished. Above all there should be a transparency in all its financial operations so that these can be open and convincing to the grassroots people, who, as has been said earlier, are the primary agents of the whole development process. The life style of a voluntary agency should be simple and unostentatious. Lastly, its programmes should definitely be cost-effective.

Such transparency and accountability must be directed to the people, as well as to the members of the agency and the

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resource agency. This calls for openness in its dealings, sharing of information through appropriate forums and continual dialogue. The gap between promise and performance erodes credibility and this gap can be bridged by constant reflection on reality as well as effective monitoring and evaluation. Ideology and action must be brought on a converging track.

Our wish for this new decade that has dawned is that the voluntary agencies throughout the country avert the crisis that is deepening within the voluntary sector. This can be effected by a clarity of vision, derived from an on going structural analysis on the micro and macro levels and above all, a respect for the grassroots people with a faith in their potential to bring about a lasting and just transformation of society.

When they first made their appearance in early 1970, the Indian development voluntary agencies clearly proclaimed themselves as an alternative movement against the technocratic, bureaucratic and capitalistic development models promoted by the UN Development Decade Programme and then applied in many of its member countries, including India.

We can rightly say that at the beginning, the launching out of Indian voluntary agencies was actually a concrete phenomenon of the sharp critiques on the development paradigm of that time, which in reality benefited merely a small group of people who have control of political, economic and cultural power. It was very often explicitly stated by voluntary agencies that development programmes should primarily be a process of people's liberation, especially of the poorest of the poor, from the oppression political, social, economic and cultural structures.

But as time goes on, and as foreign funds become increasingly easier to obtain, the majority, if not all the Indian voluntary agencies make deviations in the use of programme resources, forms, orientation, organisational structure, and what is most important, even in their primary vision and initial mission as an alternative movement which takes sides with the poorest of the poor. Sadly enough, it is no longer a secret that manipulation, corruption, mis-management and misappropriation are general phenomena within many Indian voluntary agencies

today.

Even today, after so many decades of unsuccessful experiences, the majority of voluntary agencies are still imbued with a "project" outlook. Their programmes are projects in nature, determined not by the people but by outsiders, mostly partial and artificial, target- not people-oriented, and in most cases not at all different from the development programmes that they themselves had sharply criticised in previous years. Most voluntary agencies are just implementors of projects, not catalysts with the people in their struggle for liberation and justice.

Today, many voluntary agencies have become heavily hierarchical, bureaucratic, centralist and elitist. This is particularly evident with big voluntary agencies which intentionally apply the principles of professional management adapted from the industrial world. The values behind these principles are generally in contradiction to those underlying development work, which places a premium on human dignity, democracy and respect for the right of each individual to make his or her own decisions.

All these deviations eventually lead to voluntary agencies being mirrors of the Governmental systems, the systems of industry, big business and commerce, which at the beginning were clearly recognised as the exploitative systems in which injustice is inherent! The voluntary agencies have therefore become infertile. They lose their identity, forgetting their primary vision and initial mission as an alternative movement for liberating the oppressed.

If such a situation is allowed to go on, we can only say that there will be a time, and that not very far away, when the development voluntary agencies will only articulate themselves as the people's enemy. In fact, we can say without hesitation, that we have witnessed cases where the people have been organising themselves against the voluntary agency that professed to come among them to bring about their development!

In order to put the voluntary agencies back in their role as a catalyst for the struggle of the people to bring about their own liberation we need to rethink the role of these agencies. The time has come for the Indian voluntary agencies to have the

courage to look at themselves critically and openly with regard to everything they have been doing until now. This requires that they reformulate their nature of existence, their position and role within the overall social systems and problems which prevail today and which will be present in the future.

This critical reflection is urgent because it becomes evident that the central problem we are facing now is not a small problem at local and micro levels but rather the oppressive power of international capitalistic hegemony as a dominant super force that is the main source of all structural problems such as poverty, backwardness, exploitation, religious, communal, race and caste discrimination, particularly in the Third World like India.

In order not to fall into the trap of this international capitalist hegemony, the development voluntary agencies should first discover or regain a clear vision and political attitude so that they can resist it ideologically and strategically. There is no option for them but to act on their primary objective which is to straighten up the democratic and just social system at all levels. It is only with a firm commitment to democracy and justice that the international capitalistic hegemony which is characterised by domination and exploitation can be countered significantly.

The voluntary agencies should therefore continuously transform themselves into an instrument and catalyst of the people's movement, in which the people are the primary actors, with a collective leadership and decision-making pattern. They are to see themselves as accountable to the people before being accountable to any other agency. This means that they should be prepared to let themselves be controlled openly and directly by the people. Most important of all, they must be outstanding in their transparency and integrity, thus undoing the general image that is held today in society of the self-serving vested interests of development voluntary agencies.

As catalysts of the people's movements, the voluntary agencies should carry out activities which orientate towards real actions, distribution of information, and political education to the people, based on the principles of non violence and very important, of solidarity between the people and the voluntary

agency and among the agencies themselves. This means that the voluntary agencies should give more emphasis to advocacy activities and people's organisations, avoiding at all costs, short term projects which in fact even diminish the dynamic of struggle of the poorest.

Most especially, Indian voluntary agencies should urgently and in collaboration with one another, review their patterns of relationship with funding agencies. These funding agencies are one of the most crucial factors influential on the implementation of development programmes. The widespread deviation from the vision and mission of the voluntary agencies which is the building up of a true people's movement finds its roots in most cases in the policy and attitude of the funding agencies. It is therefore important the voluntary agencies pose funding agencies not as the one and only resource. When cooperation with funding agencies is necessary, the voluntary agencies should make a critical selection, taking into account the political background of vision and mission of the concerned funding agencies.

### **3. The Role of Resource Agency**

It is rather clear that the resource agency should challenge an implementing agency into sharpening its vision and ideology. This does not mean that it should dictate terms or order the very running of the implementing agency, but that since both of them have entered into a contract once the funding started, they both have the responsibility to see that the objectives commonly agreed are actually being fulfilled. It could be that for a year or two there could be a sort of silent awaiting for the agency to find its way, but sooner or later, the resource agency should either question the deficiency with regard to achieving the objectives or give some directions as to how to do this.

In general, we feel there is very much more to the partnership from the part of the resource agency than just the giving of funds. Even if this agency, being foreign to our country, is mainly a learner with hardly anything of its own to offer, yet, because of its relationship with several agencies in the Third World as well as in the First World, the resource agency can offer constructive orientations to an implementing agency, especially if it is raw in a new venture. In any case, in such new ventures, the resource agency can, either directly or through

someone reliable in the country, accompany the project in its early stages, so that a right orientation and a proper working culture can be established at the very outset.

Now, after so many years of experience in the voluntary sector, we see that voluntarism is a very, very rare commodity. People are in development not because of their dedication to the poor as for earning a good salary. The author remembers asking a top Government official some time ago why there were so many agencies mushrooming all over the country, and suggested that it might be due to unemployment. His reply was "Rather it is because of unemployability!" Without being cynical, we can ask the representatives of funding agencies who visit India if they were the director of a commercial or business firm, how many of the people they meet in development, even directors of certain agencies, would they really entrust with a responsible job and give a fat salary? We have had too many disheartening experiences of people who are drawing very high salaries with a competence that is practically negligible. Just recently, we were told that the salary of a field officer in one of the big agencies here is more than Rs. 8000/- per month. I know one of them very well as a person whose only competence is his ability to use the most radical terminology but who has absolutely no concern whatsoever for the poor.

One of the main reasons of the move away from voluntarism is the easy flow of foreign funds. Everyone is aware of the many agencies who have absolutely no knowledge of the situation in our country and are boosting up salaries and creating an ambiance of competition in the whole development sector because of this. This is also the case with agencies that have their expatriate base in India and who are forced to pay their expatriate representatives on foreign rates and consequently boost the salaries of their Indian workers to an irrational degree. But this situation has created a competition and striving to raise salaries in all agencies.

On the other hand, development is no longer the voluntary amateurish task that was taken up by well-motivated people who were more concerned about the people they were working with in order to educate and organise them than their own security and future. In those days, salaries were secondary. What mattered was the development of the poor and

oppressed. Today, development has become a specialised affair. If a housing programme is initiated, it implies the employment of architects who are not only competent in their own profession but also with a certain orientation to development, people's mobilisation, etc. If it is a tourism development programme, there is need of people who have an insight into the various issues linked up with tourism, conversant with problems related to ecology, women, fishermen and coastal people who are threatened by sea resorts, tribal and mountain people who can be threatened by hill resorts. They are to be at the same time caught up with the desire to bring justice in the country's economy, social relationships, etc. Without all these skills and orientations, there will be a danger of sheer amateurism and naive experimentation that will get nowhere.

Consequently, such people have to be carefully selected and their collaboration assured not only by the implementing agency but also by the resource agency, for it is equally responsible as the implementing agency for the success of the programme in the achieving of its objectives. When they are selected, it is but just that they be paid commensurate salaries to the skills demanded of them, and hence, voluntarism will take the last place. Hence, we believe that the salaries of people in voluntary agencies who are doing a specialised job should be those of people who are really competent in their professions. But prior to that, both resource and implementing agencies had a responsibility to assure that these were really competent. Besides, competent people will not come for salaries that are not adequate to their skills in such a specialised type of development activity.

It is in this context that we bring in a reference to the salaries of the agency people in the West. These are certainly very high in comparison with those received in our country; and quite understandably, we believe. But is the competence of many of the people working in development in our country not on a par with or sometimes more than of those working in development resource agencies in the West? An incident that took place just last year comes to mind. A well known Indian architect who has long been involved in working for the poor and homeless, was visited by an architect from a resource agency, - he did not tell us which one - and in the course of their discussing the plans

linked up with the project, that person showed a real ignorance of certain important architectural points. The Indian architect asked him how much salary he was drawing. The response was a staggering figure in foreign currency. The Indian told him "If you were working for me, I would not give you even Rs. 600/- a month."

What we want to say through all this is that people from the Western agencies should now accept that salaries are no longer given on a basis of voluntarism but on the professional skill of the people involved. Here is where they have to see what is the proportion (We do not mean equality!) of the salary they themselves receive in comparison to the one they are allotting to people in the third world with the same degree of skills. Hence, there is a greater responsibility on their part to make sure that the right people are selected who do not only have the skill proper to their profession, but also a developmental orientation which gives primacy to the people's participation and mobilisation.

#### **4. What lies ahead for the Voluntary Sector?**

There is need to launch out on a new tactic. Instead of having these massive NGOs, it would be more effective to have small groups of committed individuals entering together into an area, identifying a small core group of local young people who will constitute the cadre. They will spend their time training them and leaving them to work out their own development programmes. The initiating group can help in guiding them and training them wherever and in whatever skills are thought necessary. When this cadre is formed the group can move into other areas and repeat the process of forming cadres in these areas. After some time when a number of areas are covered, the group can help to build up a network, stay in the area and help the people through coordination, provide regular training and enable them to form their own people's organisation to struggle on their own issues.

As for financing this programme, experience with some groups shows that this is possible through the local people's resources. If each adult in the community of marginalised people can contribute one day's labour per month, it should average Rs. 15/- per person. If there are 800 persons involved, this will total up to Rs. 144000/- per year - quite a tidy sum to

help the people on their process towards economic stability and liberation.

Basically we in the voluntary sector have to work harder towards empowering the people. We have to empower them both politically and economically. But this is a very difficult process. If we succeed in any measure, however small, there will be severe repercussions on them. The landless agricultural labourers today are a rather dispensable commodity. For in the present situation, it is much better for a Punjabi farmer to acquire a harvester combine than to get workers from Punjab or even from Bihar.

Finally, in view of the tremendous changes that will be brought about by the recent shift to the market economy, we will have to change our strategies of working with the poor. Some of the orientations that we NGOs will have to give thought to are the following:

- a) It is urgent that we NGOs draw out strategies to work with the poor, not as isolated voluntary agencies, but in a network that is based on specific areas, on particular issues, or on various groups of people, like dalits, tribals, women, etc.
- b) We shall have to concentrate much more on awareness training of the people and helping them to organise themselves to demand their rights from the Government.
- c) At the same time, we have to pay attention to economic development of our people in the economic climate which prevails in the country. We must help them to enter into a market economy which will affect rural areas and agriculture, being cognisant of the fact that the two forces, the industrial and agricultural are merging and will provide a stronger front against us.
- d) Above all, we must concentrate our efforts to enable the people to fight against the inhuman values which are the underpinning of the free market economy. The market by nature is opposed to the values that we uphold. We must help our people to retain their traditional values which are rooted in human nature.

We firmly believe that truly human values can be inculcated only by the people who are going to be the true agents of change. These are the poor, the marginalised and the

exploited. If we can build up communities among these people, sharing in the same goals and working together in a spirit of love and unity, we have a strong hope of rebuilding a human society that will be just, participatory and sustainable. Where there is competition and rivalry, we must help our people by example and practice to build up collaboration and cooperation. We must help our people to fight against individualism and maximising of individual profits through community life founded on sharing and solidarity. A spirit of service and a simplicity of lifestyle in our own voluntary agencies, lived among the people will help them to confront the spirit of prestige and consumerism.

**FEDINA - Foundation for Educational Innovations in Asia - is a non-profit, non-governmental registered Trust founded in 1983 to promote the ideals of:**

- ❑ self-reliance through community organisation
- ❑ community participation in development processes
- ❑ people's power (janashakthi)

## **BASIS OF ACTION**

FEDINA recognises development as an action-reflection process where people work on their attitudes/values to transform nature and their social relationships. It is concerned with changing structures. In this process enriched, not eliminated. It also signifies the symbolic relationship between the human being and nature nurture each other and serve together.

Attempts for emancipation are based on the participation of all people at all levels of decision-making. It is reflected clearly in the functioning of Fedina, Within the communities we work with and within the organisation.

## **WORKING TOGETHER**

The goal of Janashakti is to liberate people from economic, cultural and social "dependence".

Programmes in the following areas are promoted:

### **Ecology and Environment**

- ❑ social forestry
- ❑ alternative rural energy
- ❑ low-cost construction technology
- ❑ organic farming

## Health Education and Assistance

- ☐ preventive and curative
- ☐ hygiene and sanitation
- ☐ indigenous and herbal medicines
- ☐ hygiene and sanitation
- ☐ indigenous and herbal medicines
- ☐ mother and child care

## Women-oriented programmes

- ☐ balwadis
- ☐ family income and savings scheme
- ☐ kitchen gardening
- ☐ conscientisation

## Mobilising for Joint Action

- ☐ action against all forms of ecological degradation
- ☐ asserting the tribal right to use of forests
- ☐ consientising for action against atrocities on women, dalits and tribals

## Education for Change

- ☐ societal analysis
- ☐ developing participatory
- ☐ promoting communal harmony
- ☐ deepening and renewing the cultural heritage of the communities we work with

## PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

Fedina associates itself mainly with the poor and marginalised; tribals, dalits and women are of special concern. Spread over six geographics areas in three southern states, the programme covers a very large number of people.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Desmond D'Abreo draws his basic understanding of people and society as a theologian.

His ongoing involvement in public concerns was consolidated in his role as the assistant editor of Indian Express, New Delhi, prior to the national emergency.

The subsequent years brought him closer to the rural poor in South India.

In madras, a rural development forum under the identity of Development Education Service (DEEDS) was initiated by him. The forum had the objective of working for changes in the lives of the rural poor. The main objective of the forum was to enable the rural poor to participate in their own development.

Having contributed to the self reliance of this forum, Desmond realised the need for his service availability to wider sections of rural development.

From 1987, he continues to function as a development consultant making himself available to the rural development sector, in the different disciplines of developmental interventions.